

SDSU involved

A good project — in danger

Quiet, scientific ventures involving Egypt and Israel have suffered their share of the frustrations that seem to plague all attempts at international cooperation in the Middle East.

Lamentably, many Egyptian scientists have refused to cooperate with the Israelis for fear of professional and social ostracism at home.

The severity of such pressures was evident this week when 40 scientists who have participated in the bilateral program met in Washington to discuss its accomplishments. Egyptian delegates, apprehensive about adverse publicity in the Arab world, requested anonymity from *The Washington Post*.

Regardless, the joint Egyptian-Israeli venture, formally known as the Middle East Scientific Program, may be the most successful by-product of the 1979 Camp David accord.

Although relations between Egypt and Israel are uneasy, the bilateral scientific projects offer a tantalizing preview of the progress a full-fledged regional peace could offer the Middle East.

Consider, for instance, the so-called "arid lands project" that has received assistance from San Diego State University.

One of its achievements has been to breed a desert goat that thrives in a dry environment while producing more meat and milk than any other goat.

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In what has been described as a "breakthrough in desert agriculture," the arid-lands-project scientists also have developed a valuable new shrub. The "desert bush" is edible and rich in protein.

Yet another new species is the result of bilateral marine-science research. Efforts to improve the strains of commercial catches in the Mediterranean have produced a high-protein fish known as the sea bream.

Perhaps most important are the immediate payoffs from medical cooperation. Scientists from both nations combined to wipe out an Egyptian epidemic of leishmaniasis, a skin disease spread by sand flies.

Thanks to cooperation between Ain Shams University in Egypt and Israel's Hebrew University, joint battles have been waged against such infectious diseases as malaria and Rift Valley Fever.

The scientific collaboration began in 1980 with the United States providing funding under legislation sponsored by Rep. Henry A. Waxman, D-Calif.

When the program began, Waxman recalls, "many saw it as a sort

of anomaly, a gadfly program that was well-intentioned but naive."

After five years of significant breakthroughs, the program has succeeded beyond all hopes. Skeptics have become believers.

Nevertheless, the program now is threatened. The Reagan administration has proposed cutting its budget of \$5.8 million down to \$2.89 million.

Why the administration insists on attempting to curb the program is not clear. As a letter from 28 congressmen to Secretary of State George Shultz noted, the project is truly unique.

The administration obviously needs to be reminded of the program's value. As the letter states, it is "the only component of our aid to Israel and Egypt aimed at building a long-term foundation of peace rather than simply providing a short-term payoff to the two governments."

Indeed, the scientific program is unarguably one of the key benefits to accrue to both countries since the peace agreement was signed.

When the Egyptians continue to keep their ambassador from Tel Aviv and when Israeli tourists are gunned down in the Sinai, peace remains fragile.

But the scientific cooperation has demonstrated conclusively that the two nations are able to work in harmony for common benefit.

Furthermore, Jordan and Tunisia have indicated they wish to participate on an informal basis. Such steps can help provide the basis for a future regional settlement.

In view of present and potential benefits, the Reagan administration ought to agree to at least retain the current level of funding. Total annual aid to Israel and Egypt amounts to more than \$5 billion. Surely a modest sum can be found to keep alive a reminder of what real peace could mean to the Middle East.

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